



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

Infrastructure

Fall 2009



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

The Kajaki Dam controls irrigation and provides power in the southern provinces.

INFRASTRUCTURE SNAPSHOT

- Donors cooperated to reconstruct 1,866 km (86 percent) of the Ring Road; the USG reconstructed 831 km at a cost of \$500 million.
- Currently, approximately 26,000 Afghans are employed on USAID infrastructure projects.
- One of the largest USAID projects in Afghanistan, a 105MW power plant, will provide electricity to greater Kabul. It is currently partially operational and will be fully online by the end of 2009.

Data as of October 2009

BACKGROUND

Decades of war, harsh climate conditions, and neglect due to extreme poverty have left the country's infrastructure in rubble and decay. In many remote areas, it was never developed at all. The lack of infrastructure has had a huge impact on the economic development of the country. However, Afghanistan has made substantial progress in recent years.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

While constructing infrastructure in Afghanistan is critical to the U.S. Government's long-term development goals and short-term stabilization objectives, such projects face many challenges and problems. Most projects face combat-related security conditions, physically remote and inaccessible sites, and difficulties moving equipment across borders and rough terrain. Few contractors are willing to take on these challenges. Nevertheless, USAID infrastructure programs, in partnership with and in support of the Afghan Government and other donors, are successfully overcoming such obstacles to achieve objectives.

ENERGY

The rehabilitation of Kajaki Dam, a major ongoing USAID project, epitomizes the challenges infrastructure projects face. Kajaki is located in Hilmand province in the midst of insurgent violence. Despite the threats, the USG completed the rehabilitation of Unit #3, doubling the generation capacity of the dam from 16.5 to 33 megawatts (MW). The majority of that new power is being transmitted to consumers in the strategically critical south. Estimates indicate that power to Kandahar and Lashkar Gah has doubled, with both cities receiving more power now than in the past 30 years.

The \$300 million Tarakhil Power Plant is another excellent case in point. A major infrastructure project on the outskirts of Kabul, the project has required tremendous coordination between USAID, contractors, and the Afghan Government to be successful. More than 1,000 workers – mostly Afghan – were on site at the height of construction. In August 2009, Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and President Hamid Karzai inaugurated the first 35 MW of the plant. By the end of 2009, this major facility will generate 105 MW of power for Kabul, bringing electricity to more than 500,000 Afghans.

Early in 2009, USAID assistance helped achieve a major success by assisting Afghanistan to arrange the import of 70 MW of power from Uzbekistan. This figure is expected to increase to 150 MW in the near future. Working with a number of other donors, USAID helped to repair the North East Power System, which transmits the power from Uzbekistan to Kabul and other population centers. Finally, USAID is working with the Government of Afghanistan to seek private investment to further develop the Shibirghan gas fields in northern Afghanistan, so that these fields can be tapped as a source for a natural gas-fired power plant.



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Infrastructure (continued)



Photo: UNOPS

Construction crews pave a roadway that will link major cities of Afghanistan. More than 80 percent of Afghans live within 50 km of the Ring Road, a highway linking Kabul to Kandahar to Hirat. Provincial and district roads help farmers get their produce to market and allow Afghans greater access to schools and health clinics.



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

USAID is training operators and technicians to work with diesel generators. This is building the capacity, skills, and knowledge of Afghans.

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A key component to the USG energy strategy for Afghanistan is to increase government capacity to manage the sector, collect revenue, and to make the sector self-sustaining. The USG achieved a major milestone in September 2009 by working with highest levels of the Afghan government and other donors to transfer assets to a new commercialized Afghan Electrical Utility – Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS). With full support of the Afghan government, DABS will increase connections, improve revenue collection, and manage the sector with an eye to improving performance and customer service. A \$40 million USAID project will also support it with expert technical assistance.

Simultaneously, work continues under a variety of projects to raise the skill levels of Afghans at DABS, the Ministry of Energy and Water, and in the private sector. An estimated 2,200 Afghans have been trained in the past year. This work is critical to achieve a long-term impact.

USAID recently awarded a major new contract to work with communities and Provincial Reconstruction Teams to build small-scale renewable energy systems, especially in the south and the east. Through this \$80 million project, 300 communities will receive assistance to install or rehabilitate micro-hydropower, solar, and wind projects and establish the operations and maintenance systems to keep them running.

ROADS

A major \$400 million project to construct 1,500 kilometers of engineered, all-weather gravel roads in the south and east began construction in 2009, with 47 percent of the program completed and more than 5,000 Afghans employed. This project works with rural communities in the most dangerous areas in Afghanistan.

Construction of a major national highway in the north (Kishim to Fayzabad) is now 70 percent complete. Initial results show a great increase in the number of new businesses (such as fuel stations and markets) and new large, multi-story buildings that have resulted from the new construction. Likewise, completion of the Kandahar-Bikah road in the south will create opportunities for commerce by increasing access to the border crossing at Spin Boldak.

Ongoing projects include the Ghazni-Gardez Road (asphalted national highway), the Ghazni-Khost Road (asphalted national highway), and the Bamyán-Doshi Road. Currently in design, the Bamyán-Doshi Road will provide an alternative to the Salang Pass to connect Kabul to the north of Afghanistan year round.

Similar to efforts in the power sector, increasing government capacity is a priority. Currently, USAID supports the Ministry of Public Works through an operations and maintenance program to train workers on road design, performance-based contracting for road maintenance, and to establish modern mechanisms, such as a Highway Authority, for funding and maintaining the country's transport infrastructure.